

John Krohn Tank House  
13000 Foothill Avenue  
San Martin  
Santa Clara County  
California

HABS No. CA-2111

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CAL,  
43-SANMA,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D. C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

JOHN KROHN TANK HOUSE

HABS No. CA-2111

Location: 13000 Foothill Avenue, San Martin, Santa Clara County,  
California.

USGS Gilroy Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator  
Coordinates: 10.626370.4105800

Present Owner: John W. and Shirley Davenport<sup>1</sup>  
13000 Foothill Avenue  
San Martin, CA

Present Use: Storage.

Significance: This structure is typical of the hundreds--perhaps thousands  
--of tank houses that once dotted the Santa Clara Valley  
landscape. They provided a means by which ground water from  
private wells was stored and later delivered under pressure  
for domestic consumption and/or agricultural irrigation.  
This one was built for John Krohn, who moved to San Martin  
from Chicago in or about the year 1912. Its redwood storage  
tank has been removed, but a windmill remains in place. A  
portion of the enclosed tower may have housed a laundry room  
at one time.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: Ca. 1912. Krohn purchased the lot in July of that  
year. He is listed as a San Martin resident in a county directory  
compiled in 1916.
2. Architect: None known.
3. Alterations and additions: The redwood storage tank has been  
removed. A windmill remains in place, but dates from the 1920s at the  
earliest.<sup>2</sup> It is no longer in operation.
4. Original and subsequent owners:

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which  
stands the John Krohn Tank House.<sup>3</sup> References are found in the  
Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Santa Clara County, California.

1912. Deed, July 19, 1912 (recorded July 30, 1912 in Deeds, book 389, page 187). California Realty Trust Company to John Krohn, the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2) as shown in Maps, book G, page 39: "...commencing at a point in the center line of Foothill Avenue at the common corner of Lots 160, 161, 169, and 171...and running thence along the center line of said Foothill Avenue S.23°49' E.5.952 chains; thence N.66°11' E.21 chains to the easterly line of Lot 171; thence along the easterly line of said Lot 171 N.23°49' W.5.952 chains to the common corner of Lots 170, 171, 181, and 183; thence S.66°11' W.21 chains to the point of commencement."
1940. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, July 30, 1940 (recorded August 6, 1940 in Official Records, book 993, page 472). John Krohn, "a widower," to T. J. Brennan and Laura Brennan, his wife, the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.
1943. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, April 12, 1943 (recorded April 27, 1943 in Official Records, book 1138, page 348). T. J. Brennan and Laura Brennan, his wife, to Harvey Allen and Violet A. Allen, his wife, the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.
1943. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, April 12, 1943 (recorded April 27, 1943 in Official Records, book 1168, page 459). Harvey Allen and Violet A. Allen, his wife, to Thomas Wesley Field and Bessie Irene Field, his wife, the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.
1957. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, October 4, 1957 (recorded October 4, 1957 in Official Records, book 3906, page 32). Thomas Wesley Field and Bessie Irene Field, his wife, to John D. Kilcup, his wife, and Dale F. Kilcup, "a single man," the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.<sup>4</sup>
1969. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, August 26, 1969 (recorded September 4, 1969 in Official Records, book 8659, page 467). John D. Kilcup et al. to George B. Lewis and Amy S. Lewis, his wife, the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.
1970. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, April 24, 1970 (recorded April 28, 1970 in Official Records, book 8904, page 378). George B. Lewis and Amy S. Lewis, his wife, to Rodney J. Buwalda and Alice J. Buwalda, his wife, "Parcel No. 4," a part of the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.<sup>5</sup>

1973. Grant Deed--Joint Tenancy, April 17, 1973 (recorded May 9, 1973 in Official Records, book 0367, page 110). Rodney J. Buwalda and Alice J. Buwalda, his wife, to John W. Davenport and Shirley D. Davenport, his wife, "Parcel No. 4," part of the northerly 12-1/2 acres of Lot 171 of the San Martin Ranch (Map No. 2), as described.

B. Historical context: In 1850, noted traveler Bayard Taylor wrote, "As I sit here in the western foothills looking out over the Santa Clara valley (one of the three most beautiful valleys in all the world), I can visualize in the not too distant future a city of small farms."<sup>6</sup> Taylor was remarkably prescient. Beginning in the 1880s, the tremendous growth of intensive fruit and vegetable farming transformed the valley into a "gorgeous garden...its level floors inlaid with a thousand tinted squares and rectangles of orchards, dotted with country houses, and interlaced with hundreds of miles of auto roads, electric lines, and railroads."<sup>7</sup> Drawn by superb climate, fertile soil, a well-developed infrastructure of transportation and processing facilities and (not least) aggressive promotion, Easterners made their way to this modern-day Eden by the thousand.<sup>8</sup> By 1925, the county's farms--most of them 10- and 12-acre "ranches"--numbered almost 7000.<sup>9</sup> On one of these John Krohn built his tank house.

Not much is known about Krohn.<sup>10</sup> A Chicago resident, he purchased the 12-1/2 acre lot in July of 1912 and presumably removed to San Martin at about that time. The place was then a "new town on the Coast Division of the Southern Pacific Railroad," one of many little fruit shipment centers in the southern part of Santa Clara County.<sup>11</sup> Like most of his neighbors, Krohn was listed in county directories as a "farmer," and it is likely that his principal crop was prunes and/or apricots. Krohn's modest water plant probably threw out a good enough stream to irrigate his cultivated land when necessary.<sup>12</sup> But the tower's close proximity to the house--and the fact that the tank itself was protected by a roof--would seem to indicate that the stored water was used primarily for domestic purposes.<sup>13</sup> Surviving fixtures suggest that a portion of the enclosed tower may have been used as a laundry room at one time. Other portions may have been used for storage, or as living quarters for hired help. The windmill and tower are not in use at the present time, but there is no immediate threat to their existence.

Notes:

1. The property is for sale at the present time.
2. It is stamped "Gilroy Hardware Company." This firm was founded in 1925.
3. This land was originally part of the San Francisco de las Llagas rancho, later was added to the vast domain of the Murphy family. By 1893 it had been acquired (and subdivided) by one C. H. Phillips.
4. The transaction included parts of Lots 160 and 161 as well.

5. "Parcel No. 4" contains a little over 2-1/2 acres, net.
6. Quoted by Bertha M. Rice in Builders of Our Valley (San Jose: 1957), 9. The lines presumably appeared in Taylor's 1850 account of his travels through the California gold regions, Eldorado.
7. Eugene T. Sawyer, History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles: 1922), 34.
8. Yet another attraction is suggested by this advertisement in the San Jose Mercury, February 22, 1925, 9: "Orchard Snap! Look at this. Eighteen acres (of) 'cots, prunes, and walnut. This property can be farmed as long as you like and sold in subdivision when you get tired of farming."
9. Small-scale farming in the Santa Clara valley reached a peak that year, in fact. See James and McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose: 1933), 158.
10. Or of his wife Marie, who was listed in county directories from 1930 to 1940 (a 1940 deed described Krohn as a "widower").
11. It is so described in R. L. Polk's San Jose and Santa Clara County Directory for 1912.
12. Irrigation would seldom have been necessary if Krohn's property was indeed a "prune ranch," as is likely. See Susan F. Barnard's "Prunes: A Generation of Prune Ranching in the Santa Clara Valley" (unpublished, undated manuscript in the collection of the California Room, San Jose Public Library, Main Branch).
13. See April Halberstadt's "Tank Towers in Fremont, California: Evidence of Ground Water Storage for Personal Usage" (unpublished manuscript dated May, 1972 in the collection of the author).

#### PART II. SOURCES OF INFORMATION:

Old Views: No old views of the Krohn Tank House are known to exist.

Bibliography: Barnard, Susan Fagalde, "Prunes: A Generation of Prune Ranching in the Santa Clara Valley" (unpublished, undated manuscript in the collection of the California Room, San Jose Public Library, Main Branch).

Halberstadt, April, "Tank Towers in Fremont, California: Evidence of Ground Water Storage for Personal Usage" (unpublished manuscript dated May, 1972 in the possession of the author).

Halberstadt, April, "An Inquiry into the Nature and Incidence of Tank Towers in the Landscape of California" (unpublished manuscript dated June, 1972 in the possession of the author).

James, William F., and George H. McMurry, History of San Jose, California (San Jose: Smith Printing Company, 1933).

Polk, R. L., San Jose and Santa Clara County Directories (Los Angeles: 1917-1920, 1923-1945).

Rice, Bertha M., Builders of Our Valley (San Jose: 1957).

Sawyer, Eugene T., History of Santa Clara County, California (Los Angeles: Historic Record Publishing Company, 1922).

Prepared by: Jeffrey S. Flemming  
Project Historian  
August, 1980

### PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This wooden structure is one of the few surviving examples that still has a windmill attached to one side.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

#### Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all Dimensions: This one bay square structure is approximately fifteen feet by fifteen feet and has three floors.
2. Foundation: Concrete.
3. Walls: Wooden drop siding of boards that are beveled to resemble three smaller boards in each piece, painted white, with three-quarter round molding at the corners. The sides of the building slope inward toward the top at the first two floors. There is a wooden sill around the perimeter of the building at the ground.
4. Structural system, framing: One large post in the center of each wall with a diagonal brace coming down to the center post at the floor. Large redwood beams and columns and studs and rafters.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There is a wooden, open-string, open-riser stairway on the northwest face of the building extending from the first floor to the second floor. The landing is supported by two wooden posts which project above the floor level and become a part of the handrail. The simple wooden handrail extends from a newel at the first level to the post at the landing, having one intermediate support. The wooden railing extends around the landing, ending at the wall.

There is a small concrete pad at the southwest doorway.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There is a doorway to the first floor on the southwest face at the west corner. The wooden door has five recessed, horizontal panels, wooden surround and sill. There is a similar door at the landing on the northwest facade leading into the second floor.
- b. Windows and shutters: Wooden windows on the first floor have three-over-one double-hung sashes and wooden surrounds. Second floor wooden windows have four-over-four double-hung sashes. On each of the facades at the third level there is a large fixed wooden louver with wooden surrounds. There is a raking trim on each side at the head. Several small openings have been cut into the siding and have strap hinges at one side.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The hipped roof has asphalt shingles, and there is a small wooden finial.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The overhanging eaves are open and have exposed rafters. The soffit of the overhanging third floor is boxed with the same wooden siding as is on the walls.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor is entered on the southwest and is one room, having a window on the southeast, and is used for storage.
- b. Second floors: The second floor is entered from the stairway on the exterior and the one room has a window on the southwest and northeast walls.
- c. Third floor: The third floor housed the water tank, which has been removed. There is a louver on each of the walls in the center.

2. Flooring: The first floor has concrete flooring, and the second and third have wooden boards.

3. Walls and ceiling finish: Exposed wooden structure and wooden siding.

4. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Electrical: Single porcelain, bare-bulb lighting fixtures.

- b. Windmill: There is a large metal windmill supported by a large wooden frame on the northwest side of the building. The large wooden frame consists of four posts sloping in to the center that is bolted to the face of the building. There are horizontal cross braces across the members forming a ladder to the top. The windmill is mounted at the apex of the frame. The metal tail of the windmill has the following painted on one side "Pacific Hardware and Steel, Co., San Francisco, Cal," and the other side has painted "MFG. Robinson HDW. Co., Gilroy."

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The tank house sits behind the main house and in front of the barn. There is a smaller house to the northwest. A graveled driveway extends from the road up and around the tank house. There are two rose bushes on the southwest side next to the building and a tree on the southeast side. There is a large oak tree to the southeast about ten yards and a large palm tree to the northeast about ten yards. The well is at the north corner with a concrete pad around the opening. It is disconnected from the windmill.

Prepared by John P. White  
Project Supervisor  
July 1980

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service's National Architectural and Engineering Record in cooperation with the County of Santa Clara, California. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS and Kenneth L. Anderson, Jr., Principal Architect, the project was completed during the summer of 1980 at the HABS Field Office, Santa Clara, California by John P. White, Project Supervisor (Associate Professor of Architecture Texas Tech. University); David T. Marsh, Jr., Project Foreman (Howard University); Jeffery Flemming, Project Historian (University of Chicago); Jane Lidz, Architect/Photographer; and student Architects Kimberley E. Harden (Auburn University); Melody S. Linger (University of Florida); and Mathew Poe (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University).